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'New' CIA deepens U.S. involvement

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WASHINGTON — They were known as the CIA's "Family Jewels," the private sins whose public airings virtually destroyed the agency's capacity for covert action in the mid-1970s.

Eight plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. Destabilization of Salvador Allende's administration in Chile. The Bay of Pigs. The overthrow of the Diem regime in Vietnam. Snooping on American students. Opening U.S. mails.

Throughout the late 1970s, the CIA's strong-arm specialists moped, retired early or were fired as a post-Watergate Congress shined the bright light of morality on the dark corners of the spy underworld.

But now many of the CIA's covert action experts have come in from the cold, lured out of inactivity by President Reagan's vows to pull up America's socks in a worldwide contest with the Soviet bloc.

Reagan's "new" CIA has launched at least 11 covert campaigns since he walked into the White House, by far the highest number since the agency's salad days in the 1960s, U.S. intelligence sources say.

The biggest of them — in fact, the biggest CIA operation since the Bay of Pigs — is in Central America, where Reagan sees leftist subversions being fueled by Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union.

And now, public disclosures of the Central American covert operation have brought new criticism of the CIA. The controversy has grown into one of the most heated in Washington today.

Liberal congressmen want to squash the CIA campaign. There are fears that it could help trigger a war between Nicaragua and Honduras. There are high-sounding arguments that the world's leading democracy should not stoop to

international skulduggery.

Administration officials adamantly defend the covert operation, saying it is an essential part of a three-legged campaign to stem the spread of Marxist insurrection in the region between the Panama Canal and Mexico's oilfields.

The campaign combines U.S. military aid to U.S. allies fighting leftist subversion, U.S. economic aid to erase the social inequities that fuel revolutions, and CIA funds to attack the perceived root of much of the trouble — Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

In the past two years, Reagan has pumped more than \$1 billion in economic aid and \$218 million in military assistance into Central America — not counting the \$19.5 million for the CIA operation.

The number of U.S. military personnel stationed in Honduras will soon rise to about 300. Fifty-five U.S. military advisers are stationed in El Salvador, and Reagan is reportedly considering sending up to least 50 others to Guatemala. Even Costa Rica, which doesn't have an army, has received U.S. military aid.

The economic aid requests have had easier sailing through Congress than proposals for military assistance. While agreeing largely on the Marxist threat to Central America, members of Congress dissent heartily over Reagan's accent on military assistance.

Unwilling to face future charges that it "lost" El Salvador, Congress grudgingly approves only part of the Reagan requests for military aid — and wraps them in a spider's web of demands for progressive reforms by the Salvadoran government.

In recent weeks, the dispute over Reagan's approach to Central America has spilled over into the executive branch, essentially pitting the National Security Council against officials in the State Department.

NSC chief William Clark and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, both hardliners on Central America, are now said to have the strongest voices on policy.

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The platform vowed Reagan would "seek to improve U.S. intelligence capabilities for technical and clandestine collection, cogent analysis, coordinated with counterintelligence and covert action."

It also deplored Cuban and Soviet intervention in Central America and "the Marxist Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua." More significantly, it promised to "support the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to establish a free and independent government."

Reagan had been campaigning for the GOP nomination as Central America virtually went up in flames. In mid-1979, Sandinista guerrillas toppled Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza. Six months later, Marxist insurrections exploded in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala.

Congressional sources with access to intelligence information say that a few days after the GOP adopted its 1980 platform, several former CIA officials began forging the framework of a covert program to restore the agency's "strength" around the world.

These former CIA officials were described as "old-timers," some of them covert action specialists dismissed by the hundreds in the 1977-1978 housecleanings that followed congressional investigations into charges of CIA abuses — the so-called Family Jewels.